

Amendments to the Claims:

Please cancel claim 2. Please add new claim 33. Please amend claims 1, 4, 7, and 10. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A biologically pure culture of a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant VRI 003 (accession no. NM02/31074) having the following characteristics:
 - (a) it is a Gram positive, facultative rod,
 - (b) it ferments ribose, galactose, glucose, ~~fructose~~, mannose, maltose, lactose, melibiose, sucrose, trehalose, raffinose, L-arabinose and mannitol,
 - (c) it survives at pH 1.5 for up to 4 hours with a loss in growth of no more than log 3,
 - (d) it propagates in the presence of 0.5% bile salts at 3 °C resulting in an increase in optical density of 0.5 to 0.8,
 - (e) it is stable when stored in gelatin capsules at 25 °C, whereby a loss of viability of no greater than 25% per six month storage occurs, and
 - (f) it adheres to Peyer's Patches at greater than log 5 cfu per mg tissue ~~inhibiting pathogens both by a direct antagonistic effect and by triggering an immune modulation; or a component thereof.~~
2. (Canceled)
3. (Canceled)
4. (Currently amended) A composition comprising: (i) a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1 or 2, and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier; or (ii) a component of a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1 or 3 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, wherein the component is a product of disruption of a whole cell.
5. (Original) A composition according to claim 4, further comprising a prebiotic, a non-digestible dietary component, dietary fibre or a pharmaceutically active compound.

6. (Original) A composition according to claim 5, wherein the prebiotic is inulin, a resistant starch, an oligosaccharide, a gum or a beta-glucan.
7. (Currently amended) A composition according to claim ~~6~~5, wherein said prebiotic is unmodified high amylose starch ~~or beta-glucan~~.
8. (Currently amended) A composition according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 4 to 7~~, wherein said composition comprises live cells of the *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant.
9. (Original) A composition according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 4 to 7~~, wherein said composition comprises dead cells of the *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant.
10. (Currently amended) A composition according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 4 to 7~~, in the form of a tablet, capsule, powder, paste, gel, liquid formulation, dietary supplement or food product.
11. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a tablet.
12. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a food product.
13. (Original) A composition according to claim 12, wherein said food product is a dairy or dairy-based food product.
14. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a liquid formulation.
15. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a dietary supplement.
- 16-32. (Canceled)
33. (New) A composition according to claim 4, wherein the product is obtained by sonication.